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Forty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 526th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 5 October 1998, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. RODRIGUEZ CEDEÑO (Venezuela)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

ANNUAL THEME: INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND BURDEN-SHARING IN ALL ITS ASPECTS: NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR REFUGEES (agenda item 4) (A/AC.96/904) (continued)

1. Mr. VAN WULFFTEN PALTHE (Netherlands), congratulating the High Commissioner on her re-election, said he was confident she would continue to provide the excellent leadership to which the member States had become accustomed.

2. He associated himself with the statement by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union.

3. At a time of special difficulty for UNHCR, as the international refugee regime came under strain, the Netherlands Government remained committed, in both the European and the international context, to the protection of refugees and hence to continued support for the fine work, often under extremely difficult conditions, of the High Commissioner and her staff.

4. The need for an established international protection regime was unquestionable. The principles underlying the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees were still valid and human beings were still being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. He shared the concern of UNHCR at the apparent decrease in respect for the principles of the Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

5. While the total number of refugees was diminishing, UNHCR protection for persons in other categories, such as internally displaced persons, returnees and temporarily displaced persons, was increasing. More and more people were also leaving their countries in search of a better life. The Netherlands viewed the problem of mixed or composite flows as one of the main challenges to the existing structure of the refugee system. Persons in real need of protection should not fall victim to such flows or to the problems involved in dealing with them adequately.

6. New measures to counter the abuse of asylum procedures were essential. While it was understandable that people should seek to improve their living conditions through migration, abuse of asylum procedures and the increased role of organized crime and human trafficking in migration flows made it more difficult to provide protection for genuine refugees.

7. Recent conflict situations had led to the large-scale dislocation of populations, both within and across borders, presenting neighbouring countries and the international community with new challenges. Large inflows of people had a profound impact on host countries, particularly developing countries, and their resources. Political action was needed to ensure that States continued to respect their international legal obligations and the principle of non-refoulement.

8. UNHCR's protection mandate had been severely challenged, for example, in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the

discontinuation of humanitarian support had become unavoidable, and in Myanmar. The Netherlands believed that UNHCR should continue to give top priority to protection under such circumstances. Insistence on the protection of refugees' rights should come before the understandable urge to provide relief. Other organizations were more qualified to assume the tasks of reintegration and post-conflict rehabilitation. The outcome of the consultations on repatriation were to be welcomed in that context and the Netherlands would continue to urge the international development community, particularly the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to work for better coordination. The Executive Committee had already recognized the need for a more integrated approach that took local circumstances into consideration and encompassed conflict prevention, temporary protection, recovery, return and reconstruction.

9. The first ever humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council in July 1998 had reconfirmed the leadership role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, supported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance, in strengthening the United Nations response to humanitarian crises and had stressed the importance of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) as the primary mechanism for inter-agency coordination and the consolidated appeal process as the principle resource mobilization tool for humanitarian assistance. UNHCR must play its rightful role in the United Nations humanitarian response system.

10. If the refugee system based on established international rights was to survive, and survive it must, preventive action was needed to deal with large-scale dislocation as a result of violence and abuse of asylum procedures. The Netherlands believed that the world community had a moral obligation to ensure the survival of a system that had saved the lives of millions of people over the past 50 years.

11. Burden-sharing in the international refugee system required, first and foremost, a reaffirmation by the international community of its commitment to UNHCR's traditional mandate and work in the face of existing challenges. In particular, there was an urgent need to broaden the donor base for UNHCR's budget and appeals. All States must accede to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Considerations of equitable or inequitable apportionment of burdens could never be a reason for non-compliance with obligations under international law.

12. The Netherlands would continue to honour its obligations by upholding an asylum system based on the 1951 Convention and human rights treaties, maintaining its status as a leading UNHCR donor, providing humanitarian assistance where needed and participating in the UNHCR resettlement programme.

13. Burden-sharing among the member States of the European Union had been adopted as a firm political principle and was currently under discussion with respect to temporarily displaced persons. He was confident that the Union would agree on a more equitable burden-sharing arrangement which would benefit the international community as a whole.

14. As a contribution to burden-sharing, UNHCR must play a more active role in the return of persons not in need of international protection to their

countries of origin. Its monitoring role in the return process was welcome, but insufficient. He also appealed to countries of origin, which tended to place obstacles in the way of the return of their nationals, to respect their international legal obligation in that regard.

15. He believed that a viable and just refugee protection system could be maintained through the reconfirmation of the principles underlying the rights-based refugee system, a joint effort to address global refugee problems and a refocusing by UNHCR on its core tasks, supported by corresponding action on the part of the international community and the United Nations system.

16. Mr. KOLUE (Nigeria), congratulating the High Commissioner on her re-election, said he was confident that she would continue to work tirelessly, selflessly and creditably for the welfare of humankind.

17. The annual theme of international solidarity and burden-sharing was extremely pertinent at a time when durable solutions must be found to the problems created by massive global flows of refugees and returnees. Burden-sharing should go beyond protection and assistance and take account of the economic, environmental, social and political impact of such flows on host and home countries. Hence, assistance programmes should be linked to political processes, development and environmental programmes, peacekeeping, and peace-building activities, including reconciliation, rehabilitation and reintegration projects in both host and home countries. Burden-sharing should also encompass political or security initiatives to address the causes and consequences of refugee movements.

18. The principle of international burden-sharing was rooted in a wide range of political instruments. The International Conference on Central American Refugees (CIREFCA), the Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA) for Indo-Chinese refugees and the Comprehensive Response to the Humanitarian Crisis in the former Yugoslavia illustrated the commitment to cooperative partnerships that already existed in the international community, but such initiatives were still too few and ad hoc in nature. There was considerable scope for international burden-sharing in Africa, which hosted some of the largest refugee and returnee populations, often in countries that were extremely ill-equipped to cope with the associated economic, political and environmental problems. Burden-sharing mechanisms would encourage the Governments concerned to fulfil their obligations under international refugee law and facilitate efforts to find durable solutions to the plight of refugees. Subregional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority for Drought and Development (IGADD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) urgently needed assistance in the form of partnerships with international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in refugee- and returnee-afflicted areas. A more systematized burden-sharing mechanism would also facilitate a more efficient, equitable and consistent response from participating States.

19. Joint efforts by the West African States, particularly in the context of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), had brought peace to Liberia, ended the rule of an illegal junta in Sierra Leone and averted a humanitarian catastrophe in Guinea Bissau. UNHCR had been able to carry out protection, repatriation and settlement activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone, but the

peace process needed to be strengthened and sustained. The reintegration of returnees called for the restoration of basic amenities. He urged the international community to assist the home countries and ECOWAS through sustained funding of UNHCR repatriation and reintegration activities. Coordination between the agencies involved in the reconstruction programme was also necessary to maximize efficiency. Assistance to Liberia, which was attempting to cope with about 500,000 refugees and 1 million displaced persons, should not, as far as possible, be predicated on political considerations. The refugee problem in Sierra Leone would be greatly alleviated and peace would be consolidated if international donors redeemed the pledges they had made at the United Nations Special Conference on Sierra Leone convened by the United Nations Secretary-General in July 1998. The need to reintegrate civilian amputees of Sierra Leonean origin into their society after repatriation was also of particular concern.

20. ECOWAS would be further strengthened if members of the international community with an interest or influence in countries with problems or conflicts worked in cooperation with each other and ECOWAS.

21. To encourage countries in West Africa to continue fulfilling their obligations to provide protection and assistance to refugees, a systematic study should be undertaken of the impact of refugees on the environment, the economy and political and social life. Financial quantification by means of such studies of host country contributions and losses resulting from massive influxes could be used as an indicator for international donor community assistance and assist host countries in obtaining loans from international monetary bodies.

22. Hundreds of thousands of refugees were stranded in countries of asylum in the Horn of Africa because their home countries could not afford to take them back. UNHCR and the international community should look into the possibility of taking action in genuinely needy cases in order to avert new conflicts and prevent the exacerbation of existing ones.

23. Local NGOs had become increasingly active in assisting refugees, especially in Africa, but they were often left in the lurch when international NGOs departed after emergency operations. International NGOs should form joint ventures with local NGOs to build capacity and ensure continuity of operations.

24. Referring to recent criticism of UNHCR resource management, he said that Nigeria identified itself with the remarks of the Secretary-General on the competence and integrity of the High Commissioner and pledged support for her continuing efforts to restructure UNHCR.

25. Nigeria would continue to support subregional, regional and international efforts to find durable solutions to refugee problems within and outside the West African subregion and to support the High Commissioner's programmes through financial and manpower contributions. The Government's programme and manpower contributions for 1998 were 13.8 million and 25.7 Nigerian nairas, respectively. In addition, 7 million nairas had been spent on materials for the repatriation of Liberian refugees.

26. Under the new political order in Nigeria, all persons who had remained outside the country because of differing political opinions had been invited to return home. He reiterated that call.

27. Ms. HAALAND MATLARY (Norway), congratulating the High Commissioner on her re-election, said she had served UNHCR, the United Nations and the international humanitarian community with courage and distinction at a time when UNHCR had been required to bear an unprecedented burden of responsibility. Norway pledged its continued support and cooperation to the High Commissioner and her staff. UNHCR had carried out the tasks entrusted to it in a dedicated and principled manner.

28. The current situation in Kosovo was extremely alarming. The personal security, and even the lives, of humanitarian workers were often at risk. Mr. Vincent Cochetel, a UNHCR staff member who had been taken hostage several months previously, was still in captivity. That situation was unacceptable and Norway strongly supported UNHCR and inter-agency efforts to improve the safety of humanitarian workers.

29. The 1990s had been a decade of humanitarian crises, escalating internal conflict and the collapse of State structures, destroying the lives and livelihoods of thousands of civilians. The number of refugees had decreased, but the number of internally displaced persons had dramatically increased. The context in which humanitarian action was undertaken had changed fundamentally and access to those in need was sometimes deliberately blocked. The social and political root causes of conflicts could not be tackled by humanitarian action alone.

30. There was an urgent need to enhance the international community's will and capacity for crisis management. The provision of assistance in situations of forced displacement was not enough. An innovative coordinated international approach was necessary to forge closer links between political, military and humanitarian players and between relief and development. Her Government viewed UNHCR as the main vehicle for the international coordination of refugee protection and assistance. By virtue of its unique mandate, its standby capacities and its close collaboration with NGOs, it had proved one of the most operative functional parts of the United Nation system and must therefore play a central role in improved crisis management. Complex emergencies must be addressed through comprehensive approaches. UNHCR and humanitarian agencies should no longer be asked to tackle the humanitarian consequences of political conflicts without adequate political support.

31. The protection of refugees and internally displaced persons such as those from Kosovo was at the core of the UNHCR mandate and must remain a priority for the international community. Her delegation had been deeply concerned at UNHCR reports of violations of the principle of protection in various regions, such as the Great Lakes. The two central principles of non-refoulement and access to status determination procedures must be respected. The Government of Norway had recently decided to liberalize its asylum criteria to bring them more into line with the spirit and principles of the 1951 Convention.

32. The sharing of responsibilities and burdens was the basis of the work of UNHCR. International solidarity and commitment to partnership were vital to the successful resolution of refugee situations and the best way to ensure such solidarity was through strong political and financial commitment to multilateral solutions, in particular through United Nations agencies.

33. Under international law, the host State was primarily responsible for protecting and assisting refugees and returnees and the countries hosting large refugee populations - most of them developing countries - deserved recognition and appreciation for their generosity. The presence of UNHCR and other organizations in the affected areas relieved countries facing particular difficulties of some of the burden.

34. International cooperation to help maintain the standards of international refugee law, as emphasized in the 1951 Convention, continued to be necessary. However, if burden-sharing could not be arranged, that did not exempt countries from their international legal obligations. Burden-sharing arrangements should be flexible and based on existing international frameworks and should provide for consultation. Participants should include countries and organizations from within and outside the region and, in particular, the host country and local agencies. Such arrangements should form part of any comprehensive approach to both mass and individual displacement, although permanent mechanisms would be difficult to establish. The Government of Norway believed that the principles of international burden-sharing, and, in particular, minimum requirements for protection, should be better defined.

35. Resettlement was central to UNHCR protection efforts. Norway had decided to raise its national annual quota for resettlement by 50 per cent and encouraged other countries to do the same. Voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity was still the preferred solution for refugees, but was predicated on international solidarity. Everyone had the right to return home and all States were obliged to accept returning nationals: UNHCR had worked to promote voluntary repatriation and prevent further displacement, but, if repatriation was to be a durable solution, returnees required assistance with reintegration.

36. A world based on humanitarian principles and respect for individual dignity and rights would require new forms of international solidarity, partnership and global response, as exemplified by the new type of diplomacy that transcended inter-State relations and had so rapidly produced an international instrument banning anti-personnel mines. Norway's own commitment to such intensification of international responses had been expressed by its contribution of US$ 120 million, over five years, to mine action. Norway had also proposed the establishment of a trust fund at the United Nations in order to combat the proliferation and illicit flow of small arms, which fuelled conflict and jeopardized security everywhere.

37. Member States expected much from UNHCR in terms of effective programme delivery, but UNHCR also had a right to expect follow-up from Governments. Norway had increased its General Programmes budget to 170 million kroner and its total contribution to date during the year had also increased, to 230 million kroner. It also intended to make a significant contribution

to UNHCR programmes in Kosovo. Norway's firm commitment to humanitarian principles and human rights would continue to be translated into strong political and financial support for UNHCR.

38. Mr. KAMHEANGRIDHIRONG (Thailand) said that, having long been host to refugees and displaced persons, Thailand fully recognized that international solidarity and burden-sharing could provide a solution to refugee problems. Refugees could best be helped through a safe return home in order to resume their livelihood and participate in their country's development, but, as long as repatriation was not possible, Thailand continued to uphold the principle of first asylum for those fleeing serious fighting in their homeland, a policy that was part and parcel of shared responsibility. Equitable burden-sharing was exemplified by the highly successful Comprehensive Plan of Action (CPA), which had adopted a comprehensive approach to the Indochinese refugee problem, from prevention of root causes, through resettlement or repatriation, to monitoring and reintegration of returnees.

39. Burden-sharing in the form of financial support was crucial to countries such as Thailand, which provided temporary shelter to displaced persons and thus incurred administrative and personnel costs in meeting the continual demand for food, energy, transport, health and sanitation, as well as costs in terms of environmental degradation, deforestation, pollution, disease and support for those sectors of the Thai community affected by the influx of refugees. Funding must be increased in order to enable UNHCR and related organizations to cope better and the public in donor countries had to be informed of the sacrifices being made by the developing countries of first asylum, which in fact donated most to refugees. Financial assistance should go beyond emergency relief and focus on the reintegration and monitoring of returnees in order to prevent outflows recurring. He urged UNHCR, for its part, to provide more assistance for the education and training of refugees, particularly children and women in countries of asylum, and for returnees.

40. Resettlement was a means of sharing responsibility and safeguarded the institution of asylum. Unfortunately, some traditional resettlement countries were being more restrictive in their interpretation of the 1951 Convention and had erected physical, legal and administrative barriers to deter asylum-seekers. Taking a few cases here and there was a piecemeal approach that might ease one's conscience, but would have an undesired effect as a pull factor. In addition, countries of first asylum might feel they were being reduced to mere "immigration posts" as long as a durable solution was not found.

41. There were currently some 38,000 displaced Cambodians in Thailand. Since October 1997, 8,177 Cambodians had been voluntarily repatriated with UNHCR help and around 37,000 had returned spontaneously. A meeting facilitated by Thailand in April, between Thailand, Cambodia and UNHCR, had resulted in further voluntary repatriations. He called on all parties in Cambodia to reconcile their political differences now that general elections had been held in order to bring about stability and speed up the repatriation process in accordance with the Paris Agreements.

42. With regard to the 100,000 displaced persons from Myanmar whom Thailand had sheltered for many years, his Government's policy was to provide temporary

protection for those fleeing from the fighting pending safe return to their homeland. In accordance with the principle of solidarity and burden-sharing, the Government had formally requested an expanded UNHCR role in dealing with the Myanmar refugees, by witnessing the process of admission, assisting the authorities with registration and the relocation of camps and helping with safe return. The Government and UNHCR would jointly monitor the progress of the working arrangements. His Government hoped that UNHCR would pursue a parallel dialogue with the Myanmar authorities with a view to providing assistance within that country, particularly for the reintegration of returnees. Such efforts by UNHCR would pave the way for a durable and comprehensive solution in the form of trilateral cooperation.

43. Thailand was currently consulting with interested parties on the hosting of a ministerial meeting for an international symposium on migration to be held in early 1999 with the aim of finding a comprehensive and practical approach with a view to more manageable migration flows in the region. His Government strongly supported the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Consultations on Regional Approaches to Refugee and Displaced Persons (APC) and welcomed its secretariat to Bangkok.

44. Mr. SUAREZ (Venezuela), speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, said that responsibility for refugees could not rest exclusively with the States that were directly affected, i.e. the countries of origin, of transit and of asylum. It was essential to take a broad view that embraced the international community as a whole. That had been recognized in political and legal instruments at both the regional and the international levels and had become a universally accepted principle. The formal basis for international responsibility for refugees was to be found in the fourth preambular paragraph of the 1951 Convention, which stated that "the grant of asylum may place unduly heavy burdens on certain countries" and, although it was chiefly the countries of origin and of asylum that were concerned, the remaining States still had to bear their share of the responsibility, particularly since it was developing countries that shouldered a considerable part of the burden, as most of the world's refugee camps were found there.

45. As stated at the recent meeting of the Standing Committee of UNHCR, it was a complex task to assess the impact of mass flows of persons in either the country of asylum or the country of origin, since the overall impact was not merely economic, but also social, environmental and political, and could affect peace and security at the national, regional and even international levels.

46. The burden shouldered by the directly affected States had a significant effect on their domestic budgets. It was important for that burden to be shared at the prevention stage as well. That would require ongoing, open dialogue, first between the directly affected States and later with the international community, including international and non-governmental organizations, before crisis situations could develop or deteriorate, so as to anticipate and take steps to receive displaced populations and reduce the initial impact.

47. The burden should be shared because the problem affected the international community as a whole. An integrated, comprehensive approach therefore had to be adopted. The developing countries' burden was very heavy,

and should be offset through technical and financial assistance from countries with greater resources. While the regions had an important role to play in specific areas, the issue should be addressed from an international point of view so that countries would be able to harmonize their approaches.

48. Mr. MONTENEGRO MALLONA (Nicaragua) said he fully agreed with the replies given by UNHCR officials and the Chairman of the Standing Committee to the criticisms that had been levelled at UNHCR during the year and he commended the work of the Standing Committee, particularly that relating to international protection.

49. The difficulties experienced by the world's refugees were frequently forgotten and his delegation fully supported the UNHCR's programmes aimed at raising public awareness of their problems. The theme of international solidarity and burden-sharing reflected the spirit in which the international community had joined forces in 1951 to provide protection and assistance to Europe's more than 1 million refugees after the Second World War and his delegation endorsed the comments of the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group.

50. The costs incurred by countries striving for the protection and dignity of the innocent victims of armed conflict and violence should be shared by all. Refugees' problems were international in nature and the solutions to those problems could be found only through international solidarity. For geographical reasons, much of the burden fell to countries with seriously limited resources, for which it was difficult to provide protection and assistance or seek durable solutions. Although the chief responsibility lay with the directly affected countries, it was increasingly accepted that large influxes of refugees or returnees could hamper or jeopardize development efforts. Nicaragua was well aware of Governments' difficulties in finding durable solutions when economic, political and social structures were in a weakened state - as a result of armed conflict, for example. Nicaragua itself had made good progress in reintegrating returnees, but the combination of limited resources and the after-effects of war meant that such populations still presented problems even after eight years. Finding solutions required continuing collaboration with UNHCR and with other international organizations, in particular those involved with development and human rights, as well as the support of the entire international community, through technical and financial cooperation, in the absence of which the principles of international protection would be in jeopardy.

51. Referring to UNHCR programmes for refugees in Central America, he said that the problem of Guatemalan refugees had been dealt with by exemplary collaboration between the directly affected countries, Guatemala and Mexico, and the various international organizations involved, in a true spirit of international solidarity and burden-sharing. It was a matter of particular concern to his delegation that such a successful programme was in danger of abrupt termination for lack of funds. He called on donors to contribute to the final phase of a very valuable programme in order to bring it to a successful conclusion.

52. Despite the closure of most of the UNHCR offices in the subregion, durable solutions incorporating the concept of burden-sharing continued to be sought. El Salvador, for example, was currently in the process of integrating around 100 Nicaraguan refugees still in the country.

53. Mr. HÖYNCK (Germany), associating his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Austria on behalf of the European Union, said that his Government had a keen interest in all matters concerning refugees since Germany ranked second in terms of the number of refugees admitted. A global refugee policy was required, meaning that refugees should be distributed more equitably to ensure that the poorest countries did not have to cope with refugee crises alone, and greater efforts should be made to remove the causes of flight and expulsion. It was also important to share the financial burden, since it was unfair that only 15 countries should contribute to UNHCR's budget.

54. Although the annual theme of the current session was important, it should not divert attention from the first priority of international refugee policies, namely, the prevention of refugee outflows. Massive and serious human rights violations were the main reasons for large population displacements. Improving regional and global measures of conflict prevention, strengthening human rights advocacy and increasing international cooperation in the human rights field were proven and effective measures against the emergence of refugee situations. If the international community chose to follow that course more actively, human suffering would be reduced and the burden on receiving countries would be alleviated.

55. Mass influxes of refugees placed enormous burdens on receiving countries, especially the least developed. Even massive efforts on their part were insufficient to cope with the enormous political, economic, social and ecological consequences of such flows. The solidarity practised by international humanitarian organizations and States must continue.

56. Many industrialized countries such as Germany had shouldered a twofold burden as refugee host countries and major donors of humanitarian assistance. At both the federal and local levels, Germany was firmly committed to the high principles and standards of refugee protection as embodied in the 1951 Convention. That commitment included the implementation of the guiding principle of voluntary return, the formulation of return strategies and the establishment of conditions for safe return. Prompt return was crucial not only to alleviate the burden on receiving countries, but also to maintain a spirit of hospitality and solidarity among the population in receiving countries. Without the cooperation of its people, no democratic country could implement its obligations under the 1951 Convention.

57. It was important to ensure regular financing of humanitarian assistance. Many receiving States would continue to depend on the readiness and ability of the international community to share a large part of their burden.

58. Mr. AKASAKA (Japan) said that Japan would continue to support UNHCR's work despite its current economic woes; thus far in 1998, it had donated $100 million to the Office.

59. The regional conflicts which spawned refugee problems not only affected peace and stability; they actively hampered efforts to develop peaceful solutions, for example, in the Great Lakes region of Africa and the former Yugoslavia. The refugee crises of the past decade had created a number of problems such as a breakdown in humanitarian principles stemming from the forced repatriation and exclusion of refugees, the social and economic impact on host countries, militarized refugee camps, the separation of armed elements from genuine refugees, the security of humanitarian staff in the field and problems in gaining access to refugees, and rehabilitation and redevelopment support in post-conflict situations. Additional problems were the gradual loss of tolerance in host countries owing to the prolonged presence of large refugee populations and the increasing reluctance of donor countries to provide the necessary assistance. International burden sharing was therefore a most timely annual theme.

60. The concept of international solidarity and burden sharing was not new, but, in the past, it had traditionally been limited to refugee protection and assistance and finding durable solutions. The sheer scale of current refugee problems necessitated a broader approach involving United Nations and non-United Nations humanitarian and development agencies, international and local non-governmental organizations, countries of origin, host countries and donor countries. All agencies needed to cooperate and respond more flexibly to refugee crises and, in that connection, his delegation welcomed the relevant coordinating activities being undertaken by the Secretary-General. Political intervention was another key ingredient.

61. Because humanitarian agencies had been stretched to the limit in recent crises, governments had a duty to complement the agencies' efforts and rectify any omissions. Japan had therefore taken a number of relevant initiatives, including the organization of a series of conferences, symposiums and workshops in Tokyo.

62. Mr. FYFFE (Canada) said that his delegation deplored recent attacks on humanitarian personnel in the field. No country was immune from refugee crises, either as a source of refugees, a host country or a financial contributor. In that respect, an international burden-sharing mechanism already existed. In particular, Canada recognized the extraordinary burden shouldered by developing countries during refugee crises. Canada had given consistent support to UNHCR and was well known as a host country for refugees. Some 10 per cent of Canada's total immigrant intake was reserved for refugees in need of protection. Canada had also established a humane refugee determination system and devoted considerable resources to it. It was important to acknowledge, however, that bogus refugee claims placed a strain on those resources.

63. The tools used by the international community to deal with refugee crises had to refer to the 1951 Convention. Together with other human rights instruments, the Convention was the foundation of the international burden-sharing commitment and should be cited as a guide to action. It was also important to devise successful regional policies and national tools and programmes.

64. All countries in a position to do so should provide financial assistance to UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies dealing with refugees. Human resources were another vital ingredient. The problems of refugees could not

be addressed without the work of skilled and committed people. The staff of non-governmental organizations often exemplified those qualities. Moreover, non-governmental organizations were flexible, committed to equity and justice, thoroughly acquainted with local needs and directly involved with marginalized groups. Information based on shared experience and technical training programmes was another important resource. Above all, the most basic human resource was the social support of the local communities which received refugees and attended to their welfare.

65. The international community needed to develop resources which better addressed the full range of refugee experiences, with special emphasis on eliminating the prime causes of forced migrations. Billions of dollars had been spent on programmes to assist the victims of civil conflicts, but the real solutions to conflicts lay in the political realm. Experience had repeatedly demonstrated that humanitarian action was truly effective only when accompanied by political measures aimed at resolving conflicts. All members of the international community had a responsibility to find political solutions. In that connection, greater attention should be paid to identifying the causes of conflicts, promoting and protecting human rights and implementing confidence-building measures before refugee flows reached crisis proportions. That meant alleviating poverty and dealing with root causes such as human rights abuses. Canada was committed to working with other partners to achieve lasting political solutions.

66. States should provide the expertise to foster respect for human rights, develop tools for good governance and promote institution building. Such measures would help to prevent refugee crises and ensure that the gap between humanitarian assistance and development was bridged more smoothly. In post-conflict situations, tools and resources should be provided to facilitate the repatriation and reintegration of refugee populations. Most refugees wished to return to their homes, communities and land and the international community should find the means to help them do so. For those who could not be repatriated or integrated locally, resettlement remained a durable solution.

67. Burden sharing, based on appropriate tools and resources, could have a significant impact on refugee problems. A general framework for burden sharing in mass outflow situations should be based on fundamental protection principles. Although refugee emergencies occurred regionally, it would nevertheless be desirable to deal with them on a global basis. It remained a fact, however, that consensus on burden-sharing mechanisms would be more likely to emerge on a regional basis. The first option would therefore be to seek agreement among States with common characteristics. Cooperation among States with converging interests would then lead to collaboration among other groups of States in order to handle conflicts outside their primary regional sphere.

68. To ensure that the resources of the international community were used in the most efficient manner possible, an effort should be made to draw up an inventory of available tools and resources and assess their effectiveness for the refugee population.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.